

November 18, 2004

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Committee on Government Reform
Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources
Washington D.C. 20515-6143

Congressman:

Thank you very much, Chairman Souder, for asking me to share my views on state and local meth enforcement today. I commend you for drawing attention to the meth enforcement challenge by holding this hearing.

We are in the midst of a crisis – last year in Indiana, law enforcement seized 1,260 clandestine meth labs. The total in 2004 will almost certainly be larger. In fact, just last Friday the Indiana State Police reported to me that the state police alone have responded to 973 labs so far this year.

I can tell you that this problem – at the moment, affects rural areas more than it affects larger jurisdictions. The sky-high costs of taking down and dismantling meth labs are being carried by agencies with relatively small budgets. We have learned to be very effective at what we do, but we know we can do better if we had more resources. To get better, we need help.

Alongside the devastating physical impact of meth on abusers, the saddest aspect of the meth problem is the so-called drug-endangered children issue. Investigators in Indiana often encounter children at clan lab sites. We remove the children from immediate danger, and we work with local child protective service agencies to make sure the children are tested for the presence of meth and other toxic chemicals in their bodies. Parents who subject their kids to these toxic waste sites are held accountable through the use of child endangerment laws.

More than any other illegal drug, meth enforcement requires a high degree of training and specialization for the officers who deal with it. Many of our officers have received specialized training and equipment provided by federal agencies such as the D.E.A. This training has enabled us to more effectively seize and dismantle clan labs. We especially appreciate training on how to enter operating labs, take control of the sites, and halt production.

Let me give you an idea of the costs we have to bear in dealing with this problem. Specialized vehicle and equipment that are necessary to protect officers responding to a hazardous site are very expensive. Appropriate training absolutely essential, but it is time-consuming and expensive. Waiting for qualified clean-up companies to arrive on the scene of an active lab takes two to four hours, during which police officers who are on the payroll clock have to guard the site. They use the better part of a shift in responding to just one lab. This has a real impact on our bottom line. Hazardous material must be disposed of under strict Government regulations.

Faced with the nature of the meth problem, we cannot afford to just stand by. We have no choice but to attack the clan labs. But the costs are enormous. We are left with little choice but to appeal to our state leaders and to you in Washington to give us a hand.

Narcotics officers throughout Indiana are supporting efforts in our State Legislature to pass a bill that would require Indiana retailers to demand photo identification and a signature in a register book in order to purchase over-the-counter products that contain ephedrine and pseudoephedrine. I can tell you that we've closely watched similar efforts in the State of Oklahoma and we are aware that meth lab seizures are down by 50% from just a year ago. I think we can learn a lesson from Oklahoma's success.

I believe that, based on the experience of some states, moving ahead with proposals that place common-sense restrictions on how certain products are sold, stored or displayed can cause a significant upset in clan lab meth production. I think you should consider a federal law that addresses these issues. You just might cause a real disruption in meth production at the small "mom-and-pop" labs that are plaguing rural America.

As a drug task force commander in Indiana, I can tell you that the funding that comes from the Edward Byrne Memorial Formula Grant Program is crucial in helping us tackle the meth problem. I know there are proposals to change the Byrne program, but I want to strongly urge you, Mr. Chairman, to fight to preserve the focus of Byrne on drug enforcement efforts. The task force operations that Byrne funds are absolutely essential and effective pieces of overall illegal drug enforcement strategy. As echoed by the National Narcotics Officers Association' Coalition (N.N.O.A.C.) and the Indiana Drug Enforcement Association (I.D.E.A.), the Byrne Formula program must continue, and the focus must remain on drug enforcement activities.

Providing the means for police officers across the United States to work in multi-jurisdictional drug task forces has created thousands of drug-related intelligence leads, gang-related intelligence, and huge numbers of arrests. Neighborhoods are safer because of these efforts. In Indiana alone we have 34 drug task forces funded by Byrne that task over 200 full time narcotics enforcement officers. State and local law enforcement spends billions every year on drug enforcement, but the funding provided by Byrne is the magnet that attracts different agencies and gives them incentives to cooperate.

In our meth investigations we found that importation of methamphetamine from super labs located outside the United States is a major problem. As local law enforcement we fully support the federal anti-drug trafficking efforts along our Southwest border. We also understand that California is a very significant source of meth produced in huge super labs. Because of a lot of that meth makes its way to Indiana, we support efforts to halt the major production and trafficking activities there.

Effective meth enforcement means strong support for training and equipment, but it also means reinforcing task force cooperation through the Byrne program, it means robust funding for programs such as the Regional Information Sharing System (RISS) that dramatically improve cooperative efforts, and it means specialized meth training provided by program like the Center for Task Force Training (Centf). RISS is an information-sharing and intelligence “highway” that is available to thousands of law enforcement agencies across the country. These programs have proven effective over many years and the investment has resulted in more cooperation and more effective enforcement.

The State of Indiana established the Methamphetamine Abuse Task Force of which a copy is attached to my testimony for your review. This Task Force was organized in July of 2004, of representatives from law enforcement agencies, youth services, and family and social services.

As law enforcement officers we are sworn to protect our citizens. As we continue to fight the growth in meth abuse and production, strong federal support for meth enforcement, training, and equipment is absolutely critical. By now most people understand the meth problem, but we in law enforcement know what it takes to make real progress against it. Thank you Chairman Souder for seeking our input, and I look forward to continuing to provide guidance to you and your staff on this.

Respectfully Submitted,

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